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## NATO Enlargement:

### Putting the Cost in Perspective

by David C. Gompert

#### Conclusion

Fundamentally, Europe is now more secure than it has been in a century—one of the most secure regions on Earth. Our strategy should be to: (1) keep it that way; and, (2) get more contribution from Europeans to strengthen security in Europe and elsewhere. The investments needed to implement NATO enlargement directly support this strategy:

- The U.S. share of \$150-200 million per year will update the security infrastructure of Europe, thus helping to ensure that recent progress is made permanent.
- The new members' share of about \$1 billion per year—which they willingly, democratically, are choosing to accept—will transform their ex-communist militaries into lean and competent organizations fully answerable to civilian leadership.
- The old members' share of about \$1 billion per year will give the United States added security and reduced strain by augmenting U.S. power projection capabilities, for use not only in Europe but beyond, where more acute dangers lie.

The security of Europe, after a century of unprecedented violence, is so vital that we need not expect a specific future threat to justify this investment. Moreover, if some new threat arose, we would surely feel compelled to defend European democracy, as we did in the past—whether or not NATO has been enlarged. Rather than "costs of enlargement," these payments should be considered an investment in the future of democracy in Europe and in the ability of our allies to bear more of the burden of common defense in Europe and elsewhere.

#### Introduction

Congress faces two questions about the cost of admitting Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to NATO: (1) How much will it cost? (2) Is the cost worth it? In *Strategic Forum* #128, Richard Kugler explains that, based on reasonable and consistent assumptions, the Clinton Administration's figures—\$2.1-2.7 billion per year for NATO as a whole, with \$150-200 million per year the U.S. share—are sound. The debate should now shift to whether this would be a good investment.

Although the U.S. cost is small, it is important for Congress to understand the justification. The

Pentagon's budget is already tight: planned reductions in U.S. military infrastructure will barely pay for needed modernization of forces in the years to come. With so little slack, every new obligation must make sense. Moreover, the young democracies about to join NATO are still going through a difficult economic transition and cannot afford any unnecessary military outlays. Finally, most of NATO's current European members are struggling to live within more austere national budgets in order to qualify for the European Monetary Union; they, too, are pinching their francs, lire and deutchmarks.

As Richard Kugler explains, the "costs of enlargement" are minor compared to total current U.S. and European defense budgets. There is no need to beef up forces to defend Europe from some new threat. But there is a need for NATO members, new and old, to invest in *peacetime preparedness*. This paper identifies three strategic dividends from that investment:

1. Insurance that Europe will be fundamentally secure in the twenty-first century—quite a change for the continent that produced two world wars and one cold war in the twentieth century.
2. The creation within the new members of military establishments that are streamlined, competent, accountable, and integrated into NATO—a crucial step on the road to permanent democracy.
3. Improvement in the capability of our current West European allies to bear more responsibility and burden for security in Europe and, just as significant, the defense of common interests beyond Europe, e.g., the Persian Gulf.

### **Insuring the Security of Europe**

Because there is no specific threat to Europe on the horizon, this is the least concrete strategic gain from the proposed investment. Yet in a sense, it is the most basic. In this new era of uncertainty and flux, those charged with responsibility for their citizens' security, be they American, German or Polish, cannot neglect defense capabilities in hopes that new threats will not arise. Indeed, a consensus exists in the United States—among Democrats and Republicans, the President and Congress, the government and voters—that prudence demands a capable military even when the country is unthreatened. The same reasoning should apply to the security of Europe, scene of the worst violence in world history. To be sure, European security has improved dramatically over the last decade. Our strategic goal is to lock in that progress.

Historically, central Europe has been the fuse of European conflict. Two world wars were ignited there; a third might have been, but for NATO. Reasonable American voices now ask: Would we risk the lives of our sons and daughters to defend Poland, Hungary or the Czech Republic? But surely a threat of aggression against the new democracies of central Europe would have to be regarded as a threat to Europe itself. To presuppose a future attack on Poland that we would not consider a threat to Europe flies in the face of both experience and geography. So the fairer question is: Would we defend Europe? Three times in 80 years, Americans answered yes.

If our answer remains yes, we would defend Europe (and thus Poland), it follows that we would be wise to make that intent clear by admitting these countries into NATO, thus reducing the likelihood of actually having to do so. It follows, as well, that we should invest in the peacetime preparedness of Europe, including the new democracies. Failing to do so would suggest that the security of half but not all of Europe is important to us. In the remote event that the threat of aggression reappeared, we would rue our failure to make our position clear and to make at least minimal preparations. Conversely, the return on this investment, in that admittedly unlikely event, would be incalculable.

The expectation of a future Russian threat is not necessary for this commitment and this investment to

make sense. We should take a longer view of the safety of Europe, the security of this part of Europe and the value of NATO. The Cold War and the former Soviet threat were but one episode in a continuing history of a continent at once blessed with promise and cursed with conflict, whose future, like its past, will affect the United States and the rest of the world. Being purely defensive, this investment in peacetime preparedness will help insure a far safer century for Europe, and thus for us, than the one now ending.

In a practical sense, \$150-200 million per year should also be seen as the cost of upholding the principle that NATO must have military integrity—a principle championed by the United States. If we decline to make this contribution to NATO's infrastructure, and our current allies followed our "lead," as they surely would, we would be signaling an indifference to NATO's military underpinnings, contradicting and weakening our insistence that this is not a hollow alliance, with commitments it cannot fulfill. At best, this would suggest that we stand behind the security of the alliance's old members but not its new ones. At worst, it would lead to the erosion of NATO's entire military foundation. This investment will reinforce the discipline that enabled NATO to prevail in the Cold War, to become the world's most credible alliance, and to respond to the security challenges of the new era.

### **Transforming the Militaries of the New Democracies**

A military establishment that is integrated into NATO will never be the same. NATO "denationalized" the militaries of the original West European members, which had previously warred with each other on a regular basis. It helped reform the armed forces of several current members that were once undemocratic: Spain, Portugal, Turkey and Greece. And now it can help Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic develop militaries that lend strength and add confidence to democracy's future.

Their inclusion in NATO's military organs, their streamlining and modernization, and their use of NATO's physical infrastructure will rivet the armed forces of the new members to a model that has worked extraordinarily well for the rest of the alliance. This, too, should be considered a strategic return on the proposed investment, since the success of democracy depends on military reform, and the United States has a huge equity in democracy's success. For the country that stood, for many decades, for the right of Poles, Hungarians and Czechs to become democratic, the cost of transforming their militaries to strengthen democracy should not seem too large.

No one is more mindful of the need to reform and integrate the military establishments of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic than the countries themselves. When communism ended, the old militaries—overfed, unresponsive to democratic direction, environmental polluters, mismanagers of public resources—were unacceptable. In the years that followed, military reform was disappointingly slow compared to the rest of their political and economic metamorphosis. Creating new militaries—trim, professional, accountable, efficient, respected—is a high priority.

There are already signs of progress in anticipation of NATO membership. Civil-military relations have begun to improve; plans to streamline forces and ready them for NATO are being drawn up; the vestiges of the old Warsaw Pact militaries are vanishing. With ratification and subsequent integration, the transformation will be accelerated and finished.

One hears from American skeptics of NATO enlargement, or of bearing the costs, that the new democracies have better things to do with their money than to remold their armed forces. This point of view underestimates the importance of having a professional, apolitical military establishment in making democracy succeed. Perhaps because U.S. democracy is so secure and the U.S. military is so able, we

take a responsive military for granted. In any case, who is in a better position to understand whether the cost of joining NATO is worth it than the countries that are joining? Suggesting that these countries cannot make the right decisions on matters as weighty as their own security and the path of their own transformation is not helpful. We must show confidence in them and their democracy.

Moreover, it is by no means clear that the cost of restructuring their armed forces within NATO will be greater than the amounts they would spend over time—inefficiently, no doubt—on national defense if they were excluded from NATO. Becoming members of the world's strongest alliance, led by the world's strongest country, is bound to improve their security, perceived and real. So Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, if excluded, would either end up spending more on security or else feeling less secure. In any event, without the military and management discipline provided by NATO, they could waste their resources and squander their chance for permanent security. If we are genuinely concerned about the wise and economical allocation of resources on defense by the new democracies, NATO membership is not the problem but the solution.

### **Improving West European Contributions to the Defense of Common Interests**

The third strategic dividend from the proposed NATO investment is potentially the biggest for the security of U.S. interests. Unlike the United States, which is highly capable of projecting military power, the bulk of West European forces are suitable mainly for border defense—a holdover from the Cold War. If another Gulf War occurred today, the NATO allies would be no more able to contribute major forces to a U.S.-led coalition than they were in 1990, when they provided less than 10 percent of the force (by the most charitable measure). If we could increase this to, say, 20 percent, the benefit for the United States would be great. The allies could share more in the cost and risk—and, in the worst case, the casualties—while giving the coalition more overall muscle. In peacetime, the allies could take some of the strain off the U.S. force structure, which is now laboring hard to meet the need for peacekeeping while also remaining ready for major conflict.

What has NATO enlargement to do with the defense of the Persian Gulf and other common interests? A great deal. The military strategy to provide for the security of the new members does not call for permanent forward defense, Cold-War-style. There is no need to base U.S. and West European forces on the soil of the new members. Provided the necessary NATO infrastructure improvements are made—which depends on the United States and the other allies making the investment—we can refrain from deploying forces eastward unless and until a need arises. This strategy will not require any improvement in U.S. forces, which are already highly mobile. (This explains why the U.S. share of the cost of enlargement is less than Western Europe's.) But major improvement is needed in the ability of German, French, British and other West European forces to deploy and operate at a distance. Enlargement gives our current allies not only a motivation but an obligation to enhance their forces in this direction.

As they do, they will be able to help more in defense of shared interests not only in Europe but in more dangerous adjacent regions, including the unstable but critical swath of lands from North Africa through the Middle East to the Persian Gulf. This would lessen the burden and risk of the United States and make the current \$250 billion defense budget go much further. In this sense, the nearly \$1 billion per year the West Europeans should spend on improving their forces—roughly 40 percent of the total investment—can be seen from the U.S. perspective not as a cost at all but as a direct benefit.

But can the current NATO allies afford this? Absolutely. Collectively, the European members of NATO spend about \$160 billion per year on defense, second only to the United States. By reprogramming \$1

billion, they can improve significantly their ability to project forces. We should be concerned less about whether the allies increase their total defense spending than about how they intend to spend it. The key is for them to invest more of their money on forces that can conduct distant operations. Some allies understand the need for this: the British and French, and to a lesser degree the Germans, have begun to point their defense programs away from stationary defense and toward the ability to protect far-away interests. But their progress has been slow, and enlargement should provide the needed impetus.

Congress should focus not on whether the current European allies are going to increase defense spending but on whether they are going to modernize their forces in this strategically beneficial way. And the Clinton Administration should direct its energies to ensuring that allied plans are adequate. If they are, congressional concerns about fair burden-sharing should be satisfied. It would be reasonable for Congress to ask NATO's Supreme Allied Commander to confirm that the defense programs of our current allies are sufficient to increase their share of the burden of defending NATO's new members and other common interests.

Let's not underestimate the potential of the new members to contribute in the future to the security of common interests other than their own territory—especially as they develop more modern armed forces that work with ours through NATO. They helped as best they could during Desert Storm, and they are helping in Bosnia. As their confidence in their own security and future gains strength, we should count on them to join the rest of the European allies in shouldering more of the responsibility and burden of protecting common interests.

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